

Szentkirályi, Gadamer and Deleuze, as standing in front of a Baroque church

(The building 'interpreted' with the approach of Szentkirályi and Gadamer)

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Abstract

Every era has its basic tasks that must be performed. The issues to be solved are 'in the air'; they are generated by the era; they are components of the spirit of the age. The question generated by the time (the middle of the 20th century) was: that whether the only way to reveal the truth would be the method of natural sciences (also applied by the history of architecture), or such experiences of the truth existed that could reach the surface only by means of art, philosophy or history. On these basic questions that change period by period, the different areas of arts and sciences and philosophy work almost always in parallel.

*Zoltán Szentkirályi wrote his paper *Some issues of the evaluation of the Baroque* in 1964. The opus magnum of Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and method*, was published in 1960. Szentkirályi starts from the philosophy and reaches the history of art and architecture; Gadamer starts from the history of art and arrives at philosophy. The virtual meeting of the two happens through the role of tradition in the interpretation of works.*

The works of art are 'addressed' by the knowledge of tradition, by means of which the truth carried by the work can reach the surface. The new '...while abrogating the validity of the former one, always activates and maintains all the positive results of the previous stage of development – just through the fact of abolition. This preservation role of the development is not always obvious' says Szentkirályi. In turn – as Gadamer would have continued this text – '...we are always situated within traditions, and this is no objectifying process – i.e. we do not conceive of what tradition says as something other, something alien. It is always a part of us, a model or exemplar'.

The lecture intends to show the inevitability of being familiar with tradition in the understanding of both historical and contemporary architecture alongside these two works.

Keywords

baroque · folding · hermeneutics · Szentkirályi · Gadamer · Deleuze

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Every era has its basic tasks that must be performed. The issues to be solved are 'in the air'; they are generated by the era; they are components of the spirit of the age. On these basic questions that change period by period, the different areas of arts and sciences and philosophy work almost always in parallel.

At the turn of the 19-20th century, and particularly after the cataclysm of World War II, the issue of the left-alone Self came into focus. As Péter Nádas points out in an interview, it seemed as if Hjalmar Söderberg had read *The Interpretation of Dreams* by Freud, when he wrote his book *Doktor Glas*. At that time, the understanding and interpretation of the Self meant the connection point between art and psychology.

One of the main topics in the post-war and middle period of the 20th century was recognition and exploring the truth. The basic question was that whether the only way to reveal the truth would be the method of natural sciences (also applied by the history of architecture), or such experiences of the truth existed that could reach the surface only by means of art, philosophy or history.

Zoltán Szentkirályi published two papers on the topic of the Baroque over the period of one year. One of them, *On the objectivity of Baroque forms*, was published in 1963, while the other, *Some issues of the evaluation of the Baroque* in 1964. The opus magnum of Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and method*, was published in 1960. Zoltán Szentkirályi started from philosophy and reached the history of art and architecture. Gadamer started from the history of art and arrived at philosophy. The starting point left a strong imprint on the oeuvre of both of them. It is very noticeable that – unlike it is common in the profession – Szentkirályi placed the historicity of art into the wider horizon; while for Gadamer, the issue of art and historicity remained an important topic through his entire oeuvre.

The virtual meeting of the two of them happens through *the role of tradition in the interpretation of works*. The works of art address us from a tradition, by means of which the truth carried by the work can reach the surface. Gadamer says that '...we are always situated within traditions, and this is no objectifying process – i.e. we do not conceive of what tradition says as something other, something alien. It is always a part of us, a model or exemplar...' [3, p. 316]. Moreover, it seems as if

Szentkirályi followed this: Something new ‘...while abrogating the validity of the former one, always activates and maintains all the positive results of the previous stage of development – just through the fact of abolition. This preservation role of the development is not always obvious’ [8, p. 109]. Here meets the history of art and philosophy in the middle of the century. What both of them are talking about is one of the most important keywords of hermeneutics: *tradition*. They say the same, even if it can be found only in an implicit way in the papers of Szentkirályi.

Zoltán Szentkirályi (1927-1999) studied at the Faculty of Philosophy, Pedagogy and Aesthetics at the University of Debrecen between 1945 and 1947. There, he was the student and assistant of Sándor Karácsony. No one knows exactly why he changed after one and a half years, and started his studies in 1947 at the Faculty of Architecture, Technical University of Budapest. However, this was very likely associated with the changes in the political situation, and with the increasingly suffocating political atmosphere that surrounded Sándor Karácsony. Karácsony took over the philosophy education in 1946, after the death of Béla Tankó. In 1947, Karácsony became ill, and in 1948, the ministry ordered the dean of the university to dismiss Sándor Karácsony. From this, we can see that Zoltán Szentkirályi left the university together with his teacher, quasi sensing that the leadership of the Communist Party would come to the point in 1949 to terminate the education of philosophy in Debrecen [6].

Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900-2002) dealt with art history at the beginning of his career. From 1923, he attended the lectures of Husserl and Heidegger at the University of Freiburg. The greatness of his teachers had such influence on him that he felt that if he wanted to reach this level he would have to work seriously. For him, this work meant classics and philology. He habilitated in 1927 at Heidegger, and from then on, he defined himself as the one continuing the hermeneutics of the young Heidegger. Hermeneutics, however, had different meanings for the two of them. For Heidegger, hermeneutics belongs to fundamental ontology. He says ‘... a basic feature of our being-in-the-world is to understand and interpret our environment, which means experience is inseparable from understanding...’ [9, p. 1030]. For Gadamer, hermeneutics mean the method of understanding that is a basic interpretive activity.

Why hermeneutics?

Why is hermeneutics the contact point of these two thinkers, who both possess an incredible horizon in their own area of expertise? They meet in the Work of Art, in the interpretation of it. Probably because they both came to the point that a Work means much more than something in which we recognize again the already well known. The Work of Art has irrevocable priority over the era of its creation; times are changing, but the Work is here, among us with its own identity. They consider the classic creation the Work of Art but not in the classical

normative sense. Both of them think ‘...classical preserves itself precisely because it is significant in itself and interprets itself; i.e., it speaks in such a way that it is not a statement about what is past – documentary evidence that still needs to be interpreted – rather, it says something to the present as if it were said specifically to it. What we call ‘classical’ does not first require the overcoming of historical distance’ [3, p. 324]. The intimating power of the work of art is limitless. Different ages may have different questions to ask, which can lead to the truth carried by the work, but even this truth will never be peremptory, precisely because the tradition in which we stand, and from which we ask, is always changing. ‘...the identity of a work of art is manifested only when we understand what is the specific mode of appearance that is able to detach at any time the things already understood, and to present the work of art for us as something with no completed interpretation.’ [1, p. 1178].

How is understanding shown by Gadamer and by Szentkirályi? Szentkirályi’s papers on the Baroque are in search of the reasons for the misunderstandings of the Baroque for nearly two hundred years, for which, he finds the explanation. The first explanations of posterity arrive from Classicism. They derive from the time when Winckelmann’s paper, *Geschichte der Kunst des Altertums* (1764) – the first art historical study in the modern sense – was written, and which period made the classic to be the normative one. Questioning the Baroque from its own era had influence even in the 20th century. Heinrich Wölfflin also judged the Baroque only in its forms and considered it a decline in its entirety. Moreover, Benedetto Croce used the concept of the Baroque as the synonym of bad taste.

According to Szentkirályi, these approaches follow the wrong path in many senses; they cannot lead to the right perception because the starting point is already false. One of the reasons for the incorrect baseline is that they take a whole period of art out of the real, historically given system, and they compare the phenomena to their own time, to ‘the eternal form reflecting the order’. As a result, they are looking for its values in such an area that it simply could not cover on the basis of the given period. According to Gadamer, these approaches consider history a phylogeny defined by the reason. ‘It is not tradition but reason that constitutes the ultimate source for all authority. [...] It (viz. the reason – A.P.) takes tradition as an object of critique, just as the natural sciences do with the evidence of the senses.’ [3, pp. 306-307]. Thus, with this approach, the 16-17th century – compared to the 20th century – could not be more than an intermediate step in the development; and everything that is not under the rule of reason may only be irrational.

Another reason for the wrong starting point is that, beyond their appearance, usually no meaning is attributed to the works of art, such as to Baroque arts. The criticism of the Baroque ‘generalizes the phenomena – which are themselves uncertain and become justified only by the mutual determination of all factors – to universal style characteristics without the profound

analysis of the dialectic movement of content and form.’ [8, p. 114]. Essentially, it is from this method that Baroque is considered merely the arbitrary orgy of ‘forms that become decoratively weightless’. Szentkirályi says this is also due to the misunderstanding that: ‘Always a relatively complete, developed, perceived or sometimes precisely defined content is searching for the new, more complete possibility of expression; and to this, the only way leads through the partial or total destruction of earlier forms.’ [8, p.110]. If, however, theorists attribute any meaning to Baroque beyond form and composition, then they interpret this meaning only as the demonstration of the divine nature of the church reinforced by the Counter-Reformation and of the absolute royal power.

Following this, Szentkirályi places the question in relation to the above: ‘Whether artistic expression can be understood only by contemporary man, for whom the lifestyle and the similarity of experiences help the interpretation; or does it also have a universal validity crossing over times?’ [7, p. 114]. His answer can be presumed from the question: the whole history of art proves that this is possible since – holding to the examples he mentioned – the Temples in Karnak, Reims Cathedral or the Capella Pazzi in Florence address us even today. Szentkirályi has a clear perspective on this: ‘The work of art is not only the abstract unit of content and form (composition)’ [7, p. 96], but more than that; it allows it to become open, to turn to us and thus to become interpretable at all times. This makes the interpretation of Baroque works possible for Francesco Milizia, the early theorist of Classicism, for Heinrich Wölfflin, who represents the formalist history of art or even for Szentkirályi and Gadamer or Gilles Deleuze, who will be mentioned later in this paper.

According to Gadamer, the secret of the great works is that they address us. In a Gadamer-like, non-normative sense ‘The “classical” is something raised above the vicissitudes of changing times and changing tastes. It is immediately accessible, not through that shock of recognition as it were, that sometimes characterizes a work of art for its contemporaries.’ [3, pp. 322-323]. It lies in our power to understand these works and buildings, which live with us; however – as Gadamer puts it – this is neither a better understanding nor a richer objective knowledge gained through understanding. When we *understand* something at all, it means we *understand it differently*: understanding cannot be the restoration of the original meaning. Béla Bacsó says that ‘The hermeneutic identity of a work of art means just this: it keeps that extra, which is able to shake the knowledge of posterity that usually feels itself superior to it.’ [1, p. 1176].

Understanding is based on the question-answer structure of the conversations. If the work of art addresses us, a dialogue will be started between ‘the “Opus” and me... to whom this work of art has any meaning and who wants to know again and again what it says.’ [4, p.157]. The conversation already starts with a preliminary sketch about the whole, which is going to be

continuously revised. According to Gadamer – who has made the prejudices being discredited by the Age of Enlightenment legitimate again – our preliminary sketch certainly contains both positive and negative preconceptions. For Szentkirályi, the exploration of the relationship between content and form can be considered this kind of positive prejudice, being true not only for the Baroque. If we are aware of our prejudices and let the works of art ‘speak’, they will help us in understanding. Understanding goes from the whole to the parts and from the parts to the whole, following a circular process. The process will be completed when the parts are harmonized with the whole.

Gadamer says ‘Hermeneutics must start from the position that a person seeking to understand something has a bond to the subject matter that comes into language through the traditional text and has, or acquires, a connection with the tradition from which the text speaks.’ [3, p. 330]. In order to understand tradition, we need the historical horizon. This does not mean that we should position ourselves into the historical horizon; instead, our own horizon merges with the historical one. This also removes the temporal distance, and time will no longer be a gap ‘...to be bridged (...), but actually the supporting ground of the course of events in which the present is rooted. (...) This was, rather, a naive assumption of historicism, namely that we must transpose ourselves into the spirit of the age, think with its ideas and its thoughts, not with our own.’ [3, p. 332]. Szentkirályi also draws attention to this when he criticizes the interpretation of Baroque of Milizia, Burckhardt, Wölfflin and Croce in his book, *Some issues of the evaluation of the Baroque*.

The hermeneutics of Gadamer show the standpoint from where we can understand a work of art addressing us, as well as how to bring the surplus, which is closed and hidden from the senses, to the surface. Also, due to the continuous movement of horizons, there is no self-standing truth, and this makes it possible for Szentkirályi, Gadamer and Deleuze to make different truths visible in the same work of art.

Why the Baroque?

To understand the work of art, one should address the truth of that hidden in the work. But why is the Baroque the period that is on the mind of several theorists of the 20th century? This probably stems from the complexity of the Baroque. Among the architecture of previous periods, the Antique and the Renaissance were largely under the rule of reason, while the Roman (=Romanesque) and the Gothic were more bound to the transcendent world. The Baroque is the style where the use of reason and transcendence appear equally. Apparently, they appear as contrasts, but on the philosophical level they are actually merged together, even if some theorists draw their conclusions on the Baroque only from either the form carried by the material or from the hidden content. This kind of duality in the surplus of the work of art also created a sense of tension in the world of Baroque, in the 17-18th century.

Szentkirályi thought that this condition, considered a duality, could be deduced from philosophy. With Copernicus' discovery and the development of mathematics, natural sciences became mechanical in nature. Man 'tried to calculate the unknown in possession of the known data, and if he had failed... with the help of imaginary constructions, he created the closed system of his natural environment, thus giving him the peace of mind.' [7, p. 90]. The closed system is an order arranged in a casual chain where the relationship between the elements is binding. The man of the 17th century recognized the world in this reason-causal relationship. The closure, however, means delineating, there can be no openness even on the level of the unknown because it would contradict the causality. Metaphysics mean the finite delineating of this necessarily infinite, leading from the rational to the transcendent.

Szentkirályi deduces the hidden contents of the Baroque from this philosophical discussion. Namely, the strong demand of axiality (the progress towards the infinite), '...which appears not only in the design of longitudinal spaces or space groups but also in a space form that is inherently unable to satisfy the same demand, i.e. in central spaces.' [7, p. 101]. Szentkirályi traces back the dynamics of the Baroque to axiality. The longitudinal space acquires its dynamics when the space itself is not closed, but 'it is one of the components of a complex spatial system, in which each element goes beyond itself, its form and its existence are only justified by its integral relationship with the subsequent space part.' [7, p. 102].

As metaphysics limit infinite to finite, the Baroque spatial arrangement does the same. 'In case of churches with a longitudinal nave... at the crossing in front of the sacristy, the previously horizontal axis turns to be vertical. In this way, the dynamic momentum of the space does not crane before the sacristy. Without a break, it flows on towards the dome, the graceful curvature of which quotes the infinite here too, beyond the light-ring of the tambour.' [7, p. 105].

When looking at the church of St Gallen monastery, the crossing-problem of the Baroque church also captured Gadamer. As he says, the spatial effects of this church had a strong influence on him, which he thinks comes from that 'one of the naves with the crossing of a quite massive structure and the choir are connected in a peculiarly tense and grandiose unity of form.' Obviously, the problem of the nave and crossing is the great architectural issue, the answer for which western ecclesiastical architecture had to search for centuries. [4, p. 158]. Gadamer finds the issue of the crossing in the history of architecture – not by chance, since he starts from that baseline. In his opinion, crossing is the late response of architecture for the concept of the central space and the nave, aiming to create a unity of them. As he says: 'this response synthetizes again – a kind of final summary – the tension between the nave and the central space, but in a way that the space changes its form for the one who passes through it as it could be read in two ways.' [4, p. 158].

As we can see, this is also a kind of interpretation of the Baroque space, but after further consideration, Szentkirályi gives a more complex explanation.

Finally, here is a philosopher who actually interprets the Baroque from his own perspective and his own philosophy, while of course remaining strictly at the level of the conceptuality of the time. Deleuze approaches the Baroque from the direction of philosophy, even explains it with the philosophy of the great Baroque philosopher, Leibniz (1646-1717). Partly he goes back to Leibniz's monadology concept, partly to the separation of the world into two levels and partly to the 'fold'.

The monads are the ultimate substances of Leibniz' philosophy; they are particles without extension and with active energy. They have 'no windows to the world' and are in a non-reciprocal relationship with each other; however, their synchronicity is controlled by a pre-specified harmony. 'For a long time there have been places – says Deleuze – where what is on view is inside: the cell, the sacristy, the crypt, the church... or print collection. These are the places which the Baroque privileged in order to draw from them their power and glory.' [2, p.7]. The monad represents the interior without exterior and the exterior without interior. 'Baroque architecture can be defined by that scission of the facade and the inside, of the interior and the exterior, the autonomy of the interior and the independence, if the exterior affected in such a way, that each other sets off the other. [...] Between the interior and the exterior, between the spontaneity of the inside and determination of the outside, a new mode of correspondence is needed, one which was totally unknown to pre-Baroque architects.' [2, p. 8].

His other point of attachment to Leibniz is the interpretation of the Baroque on two levels. Leibniz colligates the two movements, the tendency of the two vectors, a sinking downward and an upward pull. 'The fact that one is metaphysical and concerns the soul and that the other is physical and concerns the bodies, does not prevent the two vectors from composing... one and the same world.' Deleuze considers these two planes the two stories of material and soul, of outside and inside, where 'the matter-facade tends downwards while the soul-chamber rises.' [2, p. 12].

And finally, the key concept of Deleuze: the 'fold'. According to György Kunszt, Deleuze uses the expression 'fold' in his book on Leibniz (*The fold. Leibniz and the Baroque*) with a magic universality and compares the concept of folding to the Japanese origami. Origami is the technique that makes it possible to fold either an animal, plant or anything else from a piece of paper; 'the fold concept of Deleuze can be considered a monumental experiment for interpreting simply everything – the cosmos, the human soul, the arts, mathematics, and even the inorganic or organic materials – as the product or process of something universal and at the same time infinitely differentiated origami.' [5, p.130]. According to Deleuze, the fold enables the attachment of the two stories: the levels of material

and soul, of outside and inside. The Baroque and the fold are identical in their function. ‘The Baroque invents the infinite work or operation. The problem is not how to finish a fold, but how to continue it, make it go through the roof, take it to infinity. For the fold affects not only all kinds of materials, which thus become a matter of expression in accordance with different scales and speeds and vectors... but it also determines and brings form into being and into appearance...’ [2, p. 12].

Here stand three men in front of the Baroque church that addressed them and involved them in a dialogue. There are points of attachment, and there are differences. These points of

attachment will become part of the tradition of interpretation while the deviations and differences may result from the reality that all of them are rooted in a different tradition. Concealed things were made uncovered, but still there can be hidden truths in the Baroque works. Repeating what was said at the beginning of the study: The intimating power of the work of art is limitless. Different ages may have different questions to ask, which can lead to the truth carried by the work, but even this truth will never be peremptory, precisely because the tradition in which we stand, and from which we ask, is always changing.

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